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# Photography and art history: the history of art born from photography

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## Abstract

In the timeline where histories of art and photography intersect, Preziosi, with his statement of “Art history is born out of Photograph,” makes an initial point. As known, technologies related to cinema have played a key role on analytical Works, classification systems, and the creation of historical narrations since the times when art history appeared as a separate academic discipline in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century [1]. Widespread use of photography through the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century brings the nutrition of modern art trends and its placement in the artists’ agenda as an apparatus along itself. The stage of the art history is the universal, national museums of the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the period before the foundation of photography archives [2]. The role and efficiency played by painting to determine the plastic language of photography have always been defended in all related researches and arguments done so far. Therefore it is crucial to draw two important guide maps in the research: The first is the bodily extension and photography language which uses in art; the second one is the revelation of intersection points of art history and photography in the narration of art, the points where they blend in each other or disintegrate.

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## 1. Introduction

In history, the transition from collecting to museology came into existence as a natural result of scientific activities. According to the publications: “with the developments, and reevaluations, classifications, documentations and protection of the collections; individual work turned into a scientific and hypothetical study,” museums were constituted with the collections nationalized by means of contributions of social and political awareness [3]. In general terms, a museum - defined by the International Council of Museums/ICOM - is expressed as a continual institution administrated for the public interest in order to protect in different ways, analyze, and evaluate the whole consisting of the cultural values and specifically to promote the public appreciation and education [4]. Etymologically, the word "museum" stems from the Greek Mythology. The word

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derived from the Greek word "Mousa" which means source of inspiration [5] and it is called "Musa" in Latin. "Mouseion" means the land or temple of those fairies.

The museum-recollection held by the science of history of art in its timeline coincides with the quote, "The mere shelter against the flood of time is collection"[6]. While they righteously put the concept of "collection" into the time range, J. Elsener and R. Cardinal emphasize that mankind, with the flood arising, should tidy up his own ancestry and place one couple into the Noah's Ark in order to transfer himself into the future, better yet, reserve himself: What is saved for future should be a couple of seeds. Where these seeds are hidden is the first museum of those times, or maybe it is the Noah's Ark that will shape, orient our dreams. When we think about these sentences, the main point is, perhaps, the mankind's "classification" before "collection". Hasn't the mankind tidied up what the nature and he himself created for so long? Hasn't the first civilization indication become his first instinctive act of "seed collection" in order to stay alive and struggle with the universe? Homo-erectus made tools, and ate the plants he collected while in search of a place to shelter despite the climate changes. On the next step of the civilization, the seeds kept for later use have opened up a new page in mankind's life with the water the nature offered and the fertility of the land: Settlement!

Mankind carried the times of nomadic culture into a new era, the traditions into settlements and, by developing his habits, managed to transfer the notion of civilization into the future. Here comes up the question: "What kind of snapshots would have survived in the light of today if the photography had been discovered then?!"

Towards 180 BC, we see the interest of the Roman commander Marcus Fulvius Nobilior in "gathering objects" This famous commander brought 285 bronze, 230 marble sculpture and approximately 60 kilos of ornament to Rome. Thereby, we may well say that he laid the foundations of Rome's first special collections.

After Roman times, the collections of palace and church in Middle Ages play a key role in laying the foundation of modern museums. The strengthening of the ideas of founding a real collection owes it to - the Cabinet of Curiosities. Rare collections have no limits. All the times and places, living/nonliving, natural/artificial, and all other things are in the gravitational field of these collections [7].

When we come to the 18th century, in order to review the period it is necessary to analyze David Murray's work which was made in 1904. According to Murray, the museums were in a disorder in early 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the boundaries between art, science, nature and different fields were not considered important. The classifications were not clear-cut. The skeletons, horns of unicorn, mermaids, witches, mummies and many other different objects were all together. According to Murray, "modern museum" should be done with an expert and scientific classification [9].

## **2. Timeframe that art and photography intersect: The Art History originated from Photography**

In the education of Art History, theoretical information is always supported by visuality. In this context, photography has a key role in the education of Art History. Even though the presentation of the theoretical context has an important role, the visual points reinforcing this importance are also needed. The aforementioned visual points are photographic image. The slide (diapositive) has given its place to digital photography today. There is a wide expression field of the photography. The intended message flourishes when the academic content of the art history is combined with the expression possibilities of photography.

The expression possibilities of the photography is an accurate and effective method in adapting art history terminology to the visual points since the photography is the moment that mind, eye and heart unite in the rational and emotional context. The art history reaches the target audience by the medium of photography. This reaching of art history includes a meaning. "There is a meaning of each message for the decoder. A film conveys the message of the director, a painting reflects the viewpoint of the painter; a poem relates the feelings and

opinions of the poet; and photography bears the meaning of viewpoint and opinions of the photographer. We would like to discover the meaning of life, and make the world meaningful". It is possible to convey these quoted words of Metin Zillioğlu [9] by reversing them: "Art History bears the traces of past putting the history in the frame with its snapshots."

Erwin Panofsky [11] says that a man should grasp three levels of understanding in order to perceive an artwork or taste it in an aesthetic way. Which role should photography take on in this ongoing analysis? The natural and real meaning of the artwork, in other words, the method of determining its content is viewing it in its own place. Photography will come into play when natural environment conditions do not let it. For example, if you are unable to examine Cappella Sistina's ceiling paintings in person on-site, which Michelangelo painted between the years 1508-1512, the pictures of the Cappella will come from the 16th century and reflect its atmosphere to you.

Let's try to explain it with another example:

What should be the method to follow in comparing the two painters in "Scenes from La Passion" in which the story of Christ's entrance to Jerusalem and his burial is told, while considering the fact that they both handle the same subject? It is possible to relocate the two painters' scenes of Christs' entrance to Jarusalem in different places into the same place with the broad range of expression of the photography and its production of practical solution. It is possible to carry the scenes of Duccio and Giotto's "Entrance Jerusalem" to your work place with two projectors. Heinrich Wölfflin [12] is the one who found this method.

With his quote, "History of Art is born from photography", Donald Preziosi [13] has become the starting point of this study. Ali Artun, starts to the section *Art of History of Art in Museum* of his book titled *Museum and Modernism, Scenes of History - Art Museums I* with the quotes of Preziosi: "Today as we know history of art is born from photography. The technological developments in film, play a vital role in not only in the last quarter of 19th century when history of art emerges as an academic discipline but also in the analytic studies, classification systems and historical narratives. It is very early that analysis and evaluation framework forms, slide (diapozitive) projector that helps comparing the images enters the usage of discipline."

It is not wrong to say that there is a functioning area at the point where the birth of photography and the discipline of history of art coincide. Towards the end of 19<sup>th</sup>. Century, the common usage of photography resulted in the growth of modern art movements, placing itself in the center of artist's agenda as a tool. Before the period of the foundations of photographic archives, the scenes of history of art were the universal and national museums of 19th century [14]. Besides, rather than the discussion about whether photography is an art or not, the point is: to lay emphasis on the importance of photographic reproduction in museology in shaping the concept of representative potential of art.

The cognitive basis of museums started with the German art historian Joacan Joachim Winckelman<sup>1</sup> (1717-1768). The question that comes to mind and has been discussed in the later period is: What is the best expression of the truth?; "art?" or "philosophy?" The answer is Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, who occupies an important place in the period of history of art before photography, besides Winckelmann. His publication AESTHETIC lessons, which drew quite an attention not only in Germany but also in Europe, had an impact on the 19th century aesthetical thinking.

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<sup>1</sup> The History of Ancient Art was published in 1764. Winckelmann's reviews after he moved to Rome are important in publishing. In this book, he analyzes art as a representative of the culture and therefore and takes the initiative historical classification regarding the nation. For more information you can look. Artun, *ibid.*, p. 242.

Altes Museum in Berlin, Hegel praised very much in his lectures and located near his house, is ranked as the first monument of museum architecture. In its architect, Schinkel's mind, Berlin Museum, symbolizes the relationship of architecture-art or Hegelian dialectic. To give an example, the magnificent dome at the entrance of museum where classical monuments displayed, is a place of spirituality that exceeds art, beyond classicism and romanticism. Berlin Museum becomes a role model for its successors. Even James Stirling's famous postmodern museum Neue Staatsgalerie, opened in 1982, has exactly the same plan with Schinkel's [16].

In this stage, formalist history after photography and Modern Art Museums will determine our road map. Thus, it'll be a better choice to start with the quotes by Hal Foster: "History of art leant back on the reproduction techniques in order to isolate different kinds of objects in the same style system."<sup>2</sup> As it is seen, the importance of the representative potential of art is being emphasized. In this concept, photography or photographic reproduction archive make a clean break with museum. It is Aby Warburg (1866-1929) [17] who put photography into historical vision's service for the first time and more comprehensively. Photographic reproductions, which were added to the archives where lots of data is gathered, make systematical comparisons and by using accurate data, they interpret the methods of analysis in the discipline of history of art.

### 3. Conclusion

"Resources that enable the mind and the eye to practice, test, observe, compare, and interpret" [18]

The art branch that photography is directly in touch with is "painting". In general, it is argued in the research and discussions' having been done today that painting plays a role in defining the plastic language of photography; according to certain researchers, the reason of this situation are technical interactions. The reflection of the sections of photography from which Dadaists benefited at the beginning of the past century to the work of art with the "collage" and "montage" techniques, to create a certain order, are important samples in the line of the current development started by European Modern Art movements.

With the discovery of photography, different kinds of art gathered under the same roof of history of art. In the art academies, painting was placed in the hierarchy according to the critics that shaped its value and norms. Invention of photography and the new era of industrialization changed all the points of views towards art and images.

Harvard's oldest art museum is the Fogg Museum which opened to the community in 1895. From the Middle Ages to the present, it has been famous for its vast holdings of European and American art. With its lots of fields of art such as paintings, sculpture, photographs, prints, drawings and decorative arts, the Fogg Museum provides students, scholars and visitors with the opportunity of studying Western Art.

Furthermore, Fogg Museum which is affiliated with Harvard University and famous for practising the archive of history of photographic archive for the first time, with its exhibition called *Art of Identity: Africa Sculpture from Teel's Collection*, accepts the fact that African cultural objects can be ranked as an artwork and carries the African arts which are protected in the university's ethnology and archeology museums to the art museums.

Photography not only altered the concept of art, but also created an industrial look on the mass market productions. With the photographic technology, the fields such as advertising, news, tourism and social identity (portraiture) underwent an enormous change by making use of it. The transformation of the function of photography converted "art history" into a specialized area where there was less purchase of photographs. In the end, the meaning of art history was modified in the universities, academies and art schools where certain fields of art like cinema, popular culture and photography are mentioned. "Indeed as a number of critic have suggested photography not only echoes post-renaissance painterly conventions, but also achieves visual renderings of scenes and situations with what seems to be a higher degree of accuracy than was possible in painting." [19]

<sup>2</sup> Artun, *ibid.*, p.246 and for more information look. Hal Foster, *Design and Crime*, (Turkish Translation: Elçin Gen), İstanbul 2004, p.89-141.

"A knowledge of photography is just as important as that of the alphabet. The illiterate of the future will be ignorant of the use of camera and pen alike." Lazsho Moholy-Nagy, 1923 [20].

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